Mental Minefields: The Dark Tales of Zeki Demirkubuz

Edited by Zeynep Dadak and Enis Köstepen

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Mental Minefields: The Dark Tales of Zeki Demirkubuz

Together with Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Yeşim Ustaoğlu and a handful of others, Zeki Demirkubuz has been leading a revolution in Turkish cinema for the past decade. Born in Isparta in 1964, Demirkubuz was politically engaged at an early age, even spending a term in jail during the end of his teenage years. After studies at Istanbul University, he came to the cinema as an assistant to director Zeki Ökten, who he has often credited as his mentor.

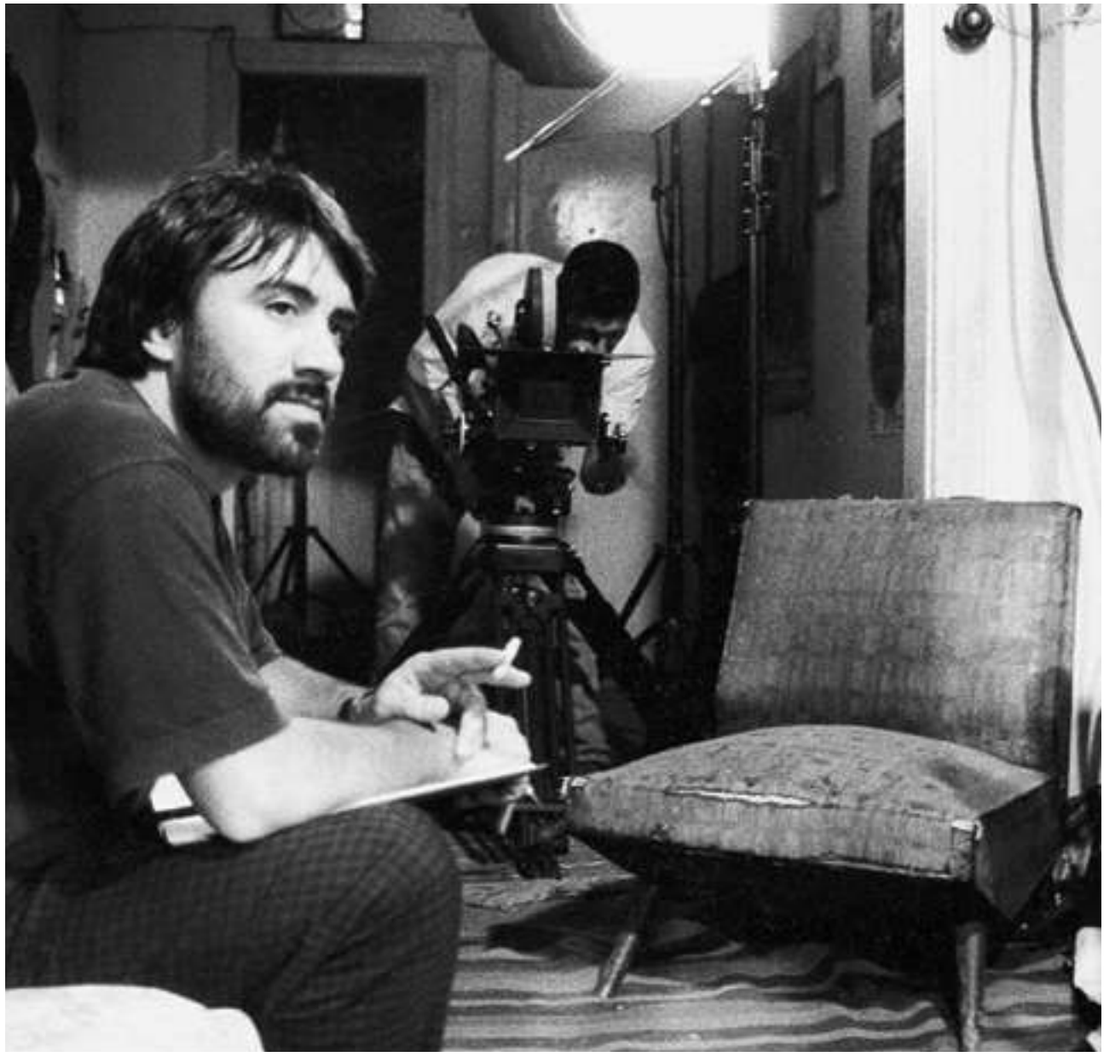
Demirkubuz established a strong, personal style right from his debut feature, *C Blok* (*Block-C*, 1994). A powerful exploration of a woman whose marriage is falling apart, the film moves freely between the perceptual world and the world of the woman's fears and desires. The cool, modern look of the apartment complex where the film is set makes an effective counterpoint to the emotions raging beneath his character's seemingly placid surface.

Traditionally, film critics have made a sharp distinction between a cinema of cold, hard reality versus a cinema of an interior, mental world inflected by fantasy and invention—Lumière and Méliès as the dual, perpetually warring fathers of the medium. Demirkubuz is one of the contemporary filmmakers who most makes a lie of that hollow distinction. In all his films his protagonists seem to move from their daily lives to worlds of their inner lives, yet one never feels in Demirkubuz's films that the alternate world is any less real to his characters. His characters are all revealed to have astonishingly rich, varied and at times frightening personal psychologies. The burden of realism, especially for nonwestern filmmakers, is often so strong that characters are reduced to social archetypes, understood as products or reflections of their environments. Demirkubuz's characters could never be seen as such, yet one never feels that their inner worlds are completely divorced from the external circumstances of these lives. His films allow us peer into the minds of his characters, helping us to understand where they've come from—and to where they might be going.

The film series, "Mental Minefields: The Dark Tales of Zeki Demirkubuz," contains all seven of Zeki Demirkubuz's feature films, including the trilogy that for many constitutes the core of his achievement: the "Tales of Darkness" trilogy, composed of *Yazgı* (*Fate*, 2001), *İtiraf* (*Confession*, 2001) and *Bekleme Odası* (*The Waiting Room*, 2003), each a completely separate film but also part of an overall portrait Demirkubuz offers of the concept of morality in the contemporary world.

This series is co-presented by the Film Society of Lincoln Center, ArteEast, and the Moon and Stars Project in collaboration with *Altyazı*.

Richard Peña
Program Director
Film Society of Lincoln Center



About Zeki Demirkubuz*

For close to a decade now, a generation of Turkish auteur filmmakers has been cultivating an increasing audience of admirers and followers, homegrown and across the world. Their unabashedly individualistic cinema, while deeply conversant with master filmmakers as diverse as Bresson, Bergman and Kiarostami, does not claim lineage from any school or filmmaker.

The constellation of names that have acquired renown includes Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Zeki Demirkubuz, Reha Erdem, Derviş Zaim and Yeşim Ustaoğlu. Their films are most often produced in Turkey by independent Turkish production outfits, which they have set up themselves. Coupled with their prolific filmographies, this fact attests to a significant turn in contemporary Turkish cinema, one that runs against the current direction of film production in the region (Eastern Europe, the Arab world and Iran) where co-productions with western European funds have often allowed for auteur and experimental filmmaking to challenge the prevalence of commercial productions.

Amongst this group, Zeki Demirkubuz has been the most prolific. *Kader* (*Destiny,* 2006), his seventh feature-length fiction, premiered in September 2006 at the Antalya Film Festival in Turkey. His filmography is versatile in genre, he has written and directed *intimiste* films such as *Bekleme Odası* (*The Waiting Room,* 2003) and big productions such as *Masumiyet* (*Innocence*, 1997), yet there are salient themes and motifs that permeate his works, the most striking being the literary sensibility of his plotlines and characters, some of which were directly inspired from masterworks of modern fiction like *Crime and Punishment* and *The Stranger*.

Born in 1964 in the Eğirdir province of Isparta, Turkey, Zeki Demirkubuz graduated from the Istanbul University Department of Communications. He was imprisoned for three years at the age of 17 for alleged communist activities. On his release, he became involved with filmmaking—more by accident than design, he claims—and began his career as an assistant to famed Turkish director Zeki Ökten. He recalls: "I was imprisoned between the ages of 17 and 21. I'm a pure unbeliever now, but I'm not an atheist: I believe in doubt, and it's that feeling that makes it impossible for me to be a communist, or a follower of any other ideology. When I was in prison I read *Crime and Punishment* for the first time, and it really helped me understand what I had lived through. I felt [my time in prison] was going to lead into something. I thought I would become a writer, but I became a filmmaker."

Demirkubuz established his own production company, Mavi Filmcilik Ltd., deliberately located outside Istanbul's mainstream Yesilçam Studios (Turkey's homegrown Hollywood). Although he intially perceived 'independent' cinema as one unhinged from the material constraints that come attached to big mainstream studios, well into his career, Demirkubuz revisited this opinion and remarks: "What is important is to be able to produce something from one's core, inner world."

He wrote and directed his first feature-length fiction, *C Blok (Block-C)* in 1994. Uncompromising and fiercely independent, Demirkubuz is known to control almost every aspect of his films, making few concessions to prevailing trends. His affinity for literature has become one of the hallmarks of his identity as a filmmaker, his screenplays conceived and written by himself have the feel of novels, and characters are given long dialogues or monologues. "In the beginning," he says, "I was trying to write the script by putting the story at the forefront. As time passed, I became more interested in making movies about a situation and not minding that the story is pushed to the background."

He first garnered the attention of film critics and international audiences with his second feature film, *Innocence*, which traveled to numerous festivals in Turkey and Europe. *Innocence* was followed by the successful reception of *Yazgı* (*Fate*, 2001) and *İtiraf* (*Confession,* 2001), both of which were screened at Cannes Film Festival's "Un Certain Regard." *Confession* and *The Waiting Room* exemplify to him works where he has "taken a human condition or situation

*All quotes from Zeki Demirkubuz have been taken from an interview by Aydın Bal (translated by Zeynep Kılıç), published on the website of the Bosphorus Art Project, and an interview by Jamie Bell, *Sight & Sound*, February 2006.

out of our lives and written a story around it," but with *Fate*, inspired by Albert Camus's *The Stranger*, both situation and story are at the forefront.

With *Fate*, Demirkubuz inaugurated a trilogy he titled "Tales of Darkness." The trilogy includes *Confession* and *The Waiting Room*, which tells the story of a filmmaker who is unable to complete a film adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. He claims to still be eager to actually produce the book's adaptation: "I haven't been able to come up with a Raskolnikov who would be believable." The themes visited in the trilogy infuse all his work; after seven films, he observes, "I realize that I will continue to make films about these subjects."

Demirkubuz has earned a number of awards, including the The International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) awards several times as well as the Golden Orange at the Antalya Film Festival in Turkey. He claims to have been influenced by few filmmakers or schools, but recurring themes of opaque characters wrought in ethical dilemmas have inspired comparisons with Bresson and Kieslowski. In reply, he opines: "My sources have really been life and literature, and my own inner darkness."

Filmography
C Blok / Block-C (1994)
Masumiyet / Innocence (1997)
Üçüncü Sayfa / The Third Page (1999)
Yazgı / Fate (2001)
İtiraf / Confession (2001)
Bekleme Odası / The Waiting Room (2003)
Kader / Destiny (2006)

Rasha Salti, ArteEast

The Scraps of Time: Zeki Demirkubuz's Cinema

I have seen time,
It was working silently inside and outside of me,
A grave can only be dug this way,
Without lightning without axe,
A forest has tumbled this way!
I have seen time,
With how many gazes it has destroyed my dream,
And with how many thoughts!
I have seen time,
In the abyss of a moment that was like thunder.

The Scraps of Time (Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar)

In the 1990s, Turkish cinema met its first generation of independent filmmakers. To name just a few, Zeki Demirkubuz, Derviş Zaim, Yeşim Ustaoğlu, and Nuri Bilge Ceylan not only heralded a new approach to film production, they also inaugurated a novel understanding of filmmaking which immediately received considerable acclaim at international film festivals. The changing face of film production became noticeable too in mainstream productions that looked to incorporate characteristics of a more intellectual and artsy cinema into blockbusters. Not limited to but instigated by auteuristic approaches, cinema in Turkey witnessed a revitalization. Thanks to the emergence of film collectives (White Cinema, New Filmmakers), enthusiastic individuals (a young generation of filmmakers) and zealous sponsors (particularly related commercial businesses, art foundations, international funds and minor state support) a remarkable production potential was seeded. Although very different in thematic, style and production conditions, Turkish cinema at large, rekindled notable domestic viewership. In this context however, the independent directors stayed on the margins, maintaining a dialogue with a limited local audience, yet earning increasing respect. It would be misleading to say this new generation of filmmakers started a collective movement or a new wave. Rather, by ushering in a new auteur cinema, they paved the way for smaller budget films that tackle larger issues often neglected by Yeşilçam.

As much as it is a locale, Yeşilçam—which literally means green pine, the name of a street in downtown Istanbul where the majority of film production companies, film agencies and studios are located—was also a name given to a certain style of popular filmmaking comparable in some ways to Hollywood, especially classic Hollywood cinema. The zenith of Yeşilçam, during which well over 200 films were produced, lasted for two decades over the 1960s and 1970s. These years were marked by three military interventions: one of them opened a decade of limited artistic freedom after 1960; the second in 1971, divided the two decades by limiting the openings created by the previous decade; and, in 1980, the last and the most reactionary one triggered a period of decline.

Interestingly, the demise of Yeşilçam also marked the end of "Turkish" cinema and its nationalistic identity claims. Though such a statement would still be debatable, not only in terms of the increasing number of films that are about the ethnic minorities of Turkey but also in terms of international co-productions and transnational cinemas, it has become more and more difficult to locate a cinema that is primarily and necessarily Turkish. Instead, a network of global cinematic presences has initiated a questioning of national identities and an understanding of cinema in Turkey based on a multiplicity of identities. In that sense, Zeki Demirkubuz's cinema was born in a period of critical reflection, both cinematically and politically. Some directors chose to tell direct stories about the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état in a neo-liberalizing Turkey, while others opted to tell personal stories with recurrent themes of deception, betrayal and darkness in the search for a philosophical notion of hope. Zeki Demirkubuz, once a political prisoner himself, falls under the rubric of the latter.

Demirkubuz was born in 1964 and attended primary school in Isparta, a provincial town. He says that Isparta Gönen Teacher Training School was the first place where he encountered political ideas. As the political situation changed so did the management of the school, from the leftist Republican People's Party government to the right wing National Front. He mentions Room 4 at the school, where disobedient children—not only the leftists but anyone who was disobedient—were tortured. His first encounter with torture was in that room, and he claims it was no different from what he went through in prison later, after the 1980 coup. In the teacher training school, Demirkubuz attended the boycotts, which resulted in his first imprisonment, lasting two days, as a secondary school student. His failure in classes combined with his leftist engagements eventually forced him to drop out. So he moved to Istanbul, and his affiliation with political organizations only grew stronger.

With the 1980 coup, he was imprisoned for three years. During those years, he used his time to read and write. As he notes, he met the world of literature, writers like Balzac, Stendhal, and most importantly Dostoyevsky, his major influence, in prison. Once released, he started working as a street peddler, wandering from one city to another, staying in hotels, reading, observing and writing stories. In time, took the examination for external students for high school and attended the Istanbul University Department of Communications. There he met filmmaker Zeki Ökten and became his assistant director. Demirkubuz learned filmmaking under the tutelage of Ökten, a Yeşilçam master. Ökten's cinema was a subtle amalgam of quotidian comedies and bitter social criticism. Ökten's collaboration with Yılmaz Güney in the late 1970s coincided with the approaching nadir of Yeşilçam beginning in the mid-1980s and Ökten was thereby introduced to the independent process of making his films. Demirkubuz, who witnessed the transitional period of his mentor, learned the rules of Yeşilçam while familiarizing himself with the means of independent productions with smaller budgets.

Demirkubuz's oeuvre is quite experimental in terms of financing. After he kicked off with the relatively conventional production *C Blok* (*Block-C*, 1994), he turned posthaste to smaller crews and lower budgets with *Masumiyet* (*Innocence*, 1997). When he reached his sixth film *Bekleme Odası* (*The Waiting Room*, 2003), he mortgaged his apartment in order to raise money and used it as the film's location. He had friends work as the film's tiny crew, and he cast himself and his wife, Nurhayat Kavrak, in the lead roles. Although he returned to a more substantial budget for his latest film *Kader* (*Destiny*, 2006), in various interviews he has mentioned that small budgets secured the artistic freedom he required.

In the space of freedom there is a tangible emphasis on the relationship between sentiments, femininity and masculinity, which he investigates mostly through impassioned, realistic dialogue that refers to the darkness enveloping a cinematic world drenched in cynism. Thematic and stylistic motifs associated with Demirkubuz's cinema are grounded in this darkness. However, this uncovers an apparent contradiction. Zeki Demirkubuz's cinema is thematically centered on the question of faith. Regardless of the fact that Demirkubuz has been largely criticized for being too skeptical by film scholars and critics, in *İtiraf* (*Confession*, 2001) Harun pleads, "Have you ever met a man who doesn't believe in anything? Even the most cruel of all has something to believe in." Similarly, writer Rıza Kıraç has argued that hope is the lynchpin of the recurrent themes of darkness in Demirkubuz cinema. Kıraç notes "although darkness initially recalls evil, in order to shoot a dark scene, you have to light it up" (2002:51). This observation makes two important points: Demirkubuz's films can be understood in terms of a search for a light of hope and that lighting up the darkness illuminates evil. It is this illumination that operates side by side with darkness in Demirkubuz's cinema.

As such, Demirkubuz skillfully places larger philosophical issues into spaces associated with particular scraps of time—not essentialist but local, not all encompassing but universal. Time is historical, as this essay suggests by looking at the era in which Zeki Demirkubuz made his films. His attention to post-1980 Turkey through his depiction of alienated individuals provides insights

into a larger existential angst deeply embedded in, even innate, to Turkish society. Demirkubuz's films throw back to Yeşilçam melodramas yet with stories imbued with Sartre, Dostoyevsky, Camus and Beckett. Time is also cinematic and his films have been compared to the work of Antonioni, Tarkovsky and Bresson. While hotel lobbies evoke the lumpen existence of the unemployed and idle (as in *Innocence*, *Destiny* and *The Third Page*), tightly packed apartment buildings evoke soulless spaces in a frozen temporality, all cast against the context of a purportedly modernizing Turkey. Ironically, the existential angst is vehicled to the audience through the use of an invisible sense of time. A good number of critical writings have reflected on the use of space in Demirkubuz films. The use of inside space—hotel lobbies, dense apartment buildings, corridors, doorways, waiting rooms, coffeehouses, prisons, mental hospitals—seems to be one of the main elements in his cinema that casts the claustrophobic mood in the films, and which exposes the sustained state of ennui or apathy in the characters' inner worlds. Given that his cinematographic image is unique in its ability to represent the spatial and temporal coordinates of objects and events, one has to consider seriously the use and sense of time in his films.

In *Innocence* and *Destiny*, how much time do characters spend sitting around hotel lobbies and rooms? How much time does Bekir spend going back and forth between his family and Uğur? The likely answer is a lifetime, and yet we do not realize this through filmic devices that make us aware that time is passing. Scenes jump from one to the next (maybe months, maybe years have passed in between) and the director deserts us to another singular moment in time. We do not even know whether the characters are growing older, or if changes in their features are leftovers from the heavy burden of what the have endured.

Tülay, the protagonist of *Block-C*, wanders around the city on her own and spends time driving in her car. How much time does she spend wandering? Just a few days or more? At the end of the movie, she comes back to the apartment building where her previous life took place. She returns to the same place to visit one last time in order to see what she has left behind. She is now a stranger to her own life and not surprisingly this is the first time she notices the sign on the building door: "Strangers—beggars and street peddlers—are not allowed."

Demirkubuz never chooses to underline the fact that time is actually passing. He is interested in ordinary life. As he constantly mentions in interviews, he is trying to create "a sense of life." Unlike the master narratives of history and therefore time, the time of daily life has a cyclic and repetitive structure. This repetitiveness triggers an anxious feeling as if "time were passing by very quickly," yet boredom concomitantly stems from the patterns and routine activities that recur daily, as if time does not pass at all.

An anecdote told by Zeki Demirkubuz exemplifies the sense of ennui that generates and is reciprocally generated by the ordinariness of everyday life. During a summer holiday when Demirkubuz was in second or third grade, he had nothing to do and nobody was around so he visited his school, which then seemed deserted. He sat on a wall and watched: "The people and the vehicles were passing by from far away; they seemed as if they were only visions under the bright sunlight and for some reason their sounds were inaudible. Suddenly, two boys came. They looked just like me. They were holding a ball in their hands and they slowly, wearily, started playing with it. I remember the sound of that ball very clearly: pit-a-pat. And once in a while, they threw the ball to the basket. They played for a little while and soon were tired. They left the ball there and sat by the side of the wall. The ball continued rolling and stopped very slowly at the side of the building. It is impossible for me to describe how silent that moment was. I just sat there staring at the ball and the kids. Then I looked at the school building and felt a very strong and weird kind of pain. It grew stronger and stronger inside of me. I met with pain there, that day, for the first time in my life. I don't remember suffering that much again in the rest of my life, like that day I did at the school garden." (2006:85)

The feeling that Demirkubuz describes here captures the mood of his films perfectly. The way

he narrates this simple moment he experienced as a child is revealing of how he tells stories. Neither the years he spent in prison nor the years he worked in factories compel him to describe this causeless pain he encountered as a small child in this manner. Nevertheless, Demirkubuz does not tell autobiographical stories. His concern is "… not to imitate reality but to make reality felt, to create a feeling about life itself" (2006:98). To avoid referring to a particular reality, Demirkubuz opts out of setting a designated time for his films, but instead chooses to leave the stories in an unfolded present. Even in *Destiny*, the prequel to *Innocence*, he does not go back and imitate the 1980s where the story ought to be taking place, but carries his characters to the present. Thus, are the characters encapsulated in time. To be more precise, they seem to exist within the indefinite limits of the moment. They do not move towards the future or look back to the past; they mingle in suspended time. He almost never uses flashbacks (except in *Block- C* where the character tells her story to a friend through the use of flashbacks), flashforwards, nor does he give the audience a point of reference as to when an ellipsis is to come in the story. Mostly, it becomes impossible to tell how much time has passed or if it has passed at all throughout the film. For instance, in *The Waiting Room*, the main character is half-alive across from the TV-set and the length of his relationships with different women over time is indistinguishable. Ahmet is in a near catatonic state, he cannot or does not wish to move or undertake action. The film is about his reluctance to live life. Thus, the character (and maybe the director as well) constantly sabotages his own life. Obviously he cannot control everything that takes place around him, but he can manage to suspend it.

The situation is more evident in *Fate*. Musa, the negligent protagonist of that film, is a person who lives as if time were suspended. We recognize the repetitive nature of his life, both at home and at work, through a few scenes that repeat themselves one after the other. And even though at the very beginning of the film this cyclic pattern is disrupted by a major event, his mother's death, Musa does not or cannot break the cycle. This particular incident brings about a major change in his life, but he remains reluctant to interfere with what is going on around

him or what is happening to him. Near the end of *Fate*, we see Musa just before he is set free from prison. We learn the length of time he has spent in prison from the dialogue. The character's apathy about what is happening to him, or what has happened to him, is transferred to us through the omission of the years he spent in prison.

Apart from *Fate* and *The Waiting Room* (in which characters try to suspend life itself), characters in Demirkubuz's films, consciously or unconsciously try to break the vicious circle of time. Sometimes, the solution appears in the form of desire, as is the case in *Block-C*, *The Third Page*, *Innocence* and *Destiny*. Desire seems like an escape for these characters, a way to break the cycle in which they are trapped. This "strong feeling" that they come across creates a rupture in their lives which opens up a completely new possibility for them "to become," "to be" or "to exist." But as the stories unfold, this possibility becomes something that drags them into another cycle, to an uncontrolled situation in which they find themselves lost in time again. In *Innocence* and *Destiny*, all the characters become prisoners of their own desires. In *The Third Page,* a woman saves İsa's life, yet like the others in the end he returns to where he began: on the verge of loss. Whether desire helps or not, it is one of the ways the characters make sense of life; it provides evidence for them to feel they are alive even if it hurts. It is this leap of faith that leads to survival, even though all seven films end with a hint suggesting the beginning of another repetitive cycle.

While the main characters try to break away from this suspended time through their desires and struggles, secundary characters that surround them stand still: people wasting time in hotel lobbies in *Innocence*, hanging around coffeehouses in *Destiny* and *Fate*. These are the characters who are the real idlers. They differ from the principal protagonists in the fact that they seem to lack the existential angst or the ennui that drives the former to despair or to apathy. They are the lumpen. They sit around all day long, doing nothing, and yet they do not seem to question their "useless" existences. This uselessness either leaves them in a catatonic state in front of the TV, or drags them into causeless violence.

The suspended sense of time in Demirkubuz's films, usually shatters in abrupt moments of violence, another important motif that sets the rhythm. In the opening sequence of *The Third Page*, İsa gets beaten by a mafioso for a very long period of time. The beating scene gets longer and longer as the mafioso continues to kick him while he is lying on the floor. Another lingering scene of male violence is choreographed in a style similar to a dance number. In that scene in *Destiny*, Zagor stabs Cevat and we witness the most intimate moment of the film, as they look each other in the eye for a very long time. In *Confession*, a scene of domestic violence is staged almost in real time. These scenes remind us of the relationship between time and violence. Violence renders time visible. Witnessing such an intimate interaction makes the moment tangible. As the poet Tanpınar writes, "the abyss of the moment is like thunder." These moments are usually the moments when the characters start to actually communicate with each other. The explosions in films such as *Confession*, *Innocence* and *Destiny*, open up, surprisingly, a space for interaction. Men in coffeehouses or trashy nightclubs all of a sudden burst out; it is a tactile, sensual communication albeit a very violent one. The characters become aware of their existences and the existence of the others, piercing each other's skin. They hurt each other physically in order to get over their constant existential pain, if they have any. They try to substantiate their existences to themselves and to others around them through the use of physical power, the masculine energy that has not/could not be transformed for other uses.

Chief among the harsh criticisms leveled at Demirkubuz is his use of the violence in the representation of masculinity in his films. *The Waiting Room* especially provoked this discussion, some going as far as to accuse Demirkubuz of misogyny. This condemnation has partly to do with the fact that Ahmet is played by the director himself. On a different view however, rolling back to Demirkubuz's debut *Block-C*, then rolling forward to his most recent film, we can argue that men in all seven films are mostly impotent and incapable. Even in *Block-C*, the only Demirkubuz film with a female protagonist, the husband is incapable of showing love or affection. In *Innocence* and *Destiny* it is the burden of men's world that pushes every man to become

violent for the sake of being manly. Even when they do not want to, they are entitled to stab, kill, and have sex just to prove their manhood. From this perspective, when Yusuf begs not to be released from prison in the opening scene of *Innocence*, it is because he does not want to go back to the world where he has to perform as a man. On the other hand, Yusuf was sent to prison in the first place because he had shot his sister's lover and due to the shock, his sister had lost her voice. Thus, the silence of a woman in a Demirkubuz film inevitably reminds us of the male violence once visited upon her. Another example is little Çilem, Uğur's daughter. Çilem is mute because we learn that Uğur was severely beaten when she was pregnant. Seemingly in contrast with the mute women, stand the strong women: Uğur in *Innocence* and *Destiny*, Meryem in *The Third Page*, Nilgün in *Confession*, Sinem in *Fate.* These are the correspondences; the fatality that weighs on women is due to men's violence, mirrored in their silence.

The senselessness encrypted in that violence circles back to the existential questions that animate Demirkubuz's work. In his trilogy titled "Tales of Darkness" composed of *Fate*, *Confession* and *The Waiting Room*, he openly interrogates actions leading to consequences without reason. Notions such as existence, love, betrayal, courtship, infidelity, solitude and creation might be characterized partially as a lament for the loss of a troubled past and partially as anxiety about a nebulous future. Demirkubuz says, "we cannot ask why or what for, because this is a situation in which we are left alone only with the consequences. Be as skeptical as you wish, question it as much as you can. And this is not only true for easily abstracted concepts such as existence and death. For instance, take human relationships, love, friendship… It is all the same. Consequences without reasons" (2006:99). According to him, the main characteristics of his films are a realist feeling and a religious essence. Self-reflexively, he carries this idea to *The Waiting Room*. One of the characters asks Ahmet, the director, if he thinks "cinema is a religious matter." He does not answer. However in the extra-filmic world Demirkubuz has an answer to that question. By religious essence, he explains, "I don't mean religion in the strictest sense of the word. For that reason, I am using the term 'a religious essence.' Unlike most people, I

am not someone who can bond with religion. I am a skeptic and I don't feel comfortable unless I ask questions. This is why, even though I have a strong desire to believe, I am aloof towards concepts such as religion and faith. Faith begins when one loses his power to interrogate. And this sense of helplessness creates a will to abandon oneself to a higher power and to put an end to this helplessness […] I may not be someone who tries to explain himself or life with religion, but the feeling that comes along with the fact that some of the answers are missing is enough for me to carry a feeling about this religious essence" (2006:100).

Religion is another philosophical category for Demirkubuz. What appears as contradictory in Demirkubuz's cinema is key to understanding his films. Despite his lack of interest in religion itself, he dwells on its categories, such as faith, destiny and resignation, because he deems them the most essential qualities of human-ness. The commonsensical interpretation of the dialectic between skepticism and the need to believe is usually attributed to a universal existentialism. One can push this argument further. Although Demirkubuz refrains from naming a specific religion when describing what this "religious essence" may be, apart from recurring Christian motifs such as confession, redemption, and guilt, it is the threads of Islamic culture that envelop his stories. One category, which is crucial in combining this religious essence with existentialism, is destiny, the hidden power believed to control what will happen in the future. In an Islamic context this term has a significant role in regulating daily life, the notion of time and consequences of human action. Nevertheless, to resign oneself to one's destiny or the hands of a higher power does not necessarily lead to renouncing the world; rather, it maintains hope for being able to change things. Finally, what appears as a fatal destiny also entails a hidden hope that goes beyond Demirkubuz's auterial intentions. And therein lies the mastery of Demirkubuz: illuminating the darkness with hope breaks away the ordinariness of present time and offers hope for the future.

Zeynep Dadak and Senem Aytaç, *Altyazı*

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C Blok / Block-C

C Blok / Block-C

1994, 90 minutes
Written and directed by Zeki Demirkubuz
Cinematography by Ertunç Şenkay
Edited by Nevzat Dişiaçık
Music by Serdar Keskin
Starring Serap Aksoy, Zuhal Gencer, Fikret Kuşkan, Selçuk Yöntem and Ülkü Duru

C Blok (*Block-C,* 1994) is Zeki Demirkubuz's first film. Before he plunged into shooting *Block-C,* he had never even shot a short. Although Demirkubuz has expressed his dissatisfaction with the outcome, saying the film carried too many characteristics of classical mainstream Turkish cinema, it almost seems like he *had* to make this film before he could go on to refine his style and work out his main concerns. Indeed, it is surprising that an intense and passionate film like *Masumiyet* (*Innocence*, 1997) was to follow the cold and detached *Block-C*. However, many of Demirkubuz's signature motifs—the infamous TV set, his slow paced editing, the frames within frames that surround his characters with darkness in long lingering shots—are already identifiable in this first film. At the same time, *Block-C* features two striking anomalies of his filmography: the main character is middle class and a woman. With the exception of *İtiraf* (*Confession,* 2001), Demirkubuz has not returned to consider primarily middle class concerns or put the focus solely on a female character.

Block-C's Tülay (Serap Aksoy) is a housewife married to a businessman (Selçuk Yöntem) who takes too many business trips and usually for too long. She is left behind in their bleak apartment, which is in Block-C of a middle-class high-rise apartment complex in Ataköy, Istanbul. These blocks were built during the 1980s, a period of economic liberalization and political reconstitution in Turkey that brought drastic change to the social structure. Tülay and her husband represent the new middle class that also emerged during those years. In Demirkubuz's vision, this period and the consequences of such rapid change are reified in the inhospitable, isolated apartment complexes. Demirkubuz has likened the Ataköy buildings to housing projects from Franco's Spain or Stalin's Russia, and uses them as a metaphor of imprisonment, a recurring theme in his subsequent films. Even the title of the film, *Block-C*, accentuated by the enclosing, circular form of the letter C, is reminiscent of a prison structure. Demirkubuz was an inmate in Block-C of the penitentiary during his imprisonment after the 1980 coup; and Tülay is an inmate in Block-C of this high-rise complex in Ataköy. In almost every shot the blocks either block her vision or surround her like prison walls. They

insistently invade the frame, ominously hovering in the background, giving Tülay the impression of “monsters rising in the dark.”

The opening shot of windshield wipers monotonously slapping back and forth evokes a sense of Tülay’s life: flat, boring, and repetitive. She is trapped by the conflicting expectations of her roles of traditional wife and modern woman. Her only means of escape is her new car, which she takes on little pleasure trips. Then, one day Tülay comes back home early from one of her trips and finds her maid Aslı (Zuhal Gencer) and the janitor’s son Halet (Fikret Kuşkan) in bed having sex. Confused but also peculiarly intrigued, Tülay begins to search for what she believes has been missing in her life. Although, at first she seems to be in search of sexual fulfillment, her actions are in fact attempts to break free from the confines of her destiny—yet another central theme in Demirkubuz’s films, most recently explored in the tellingly titled *Destiny* (*Kader*, 2006). However, anticipating the destiny of many Demirkubuz characters, Tülay’s journey turns out to be a severely unsettling one.

Gözde Onaran, *Altyazı*

Masumiyet - Innocence

Masumiyet / Innocence

1997, 105 minutes
Written and directed by Zeki Demirkubuz
Cinematography by Ali Utku
Editing by Mevlüt Koçak
Music by Cengiz Onural
Starring Derya Alabora, Haluk Bilginer, Güven Kıraç, Melis Tuna and Yalçın Çakmak

Masumiyet (*Innocence,* 1997) is a cut in Turkish film: it slices from past to present in Turkish cinema; it severs the audience of its expectations; it carves through the lives and loves of its characters, and it bleeds. The film is a carefully rendered tale of unrequited love and a haunting past that reveals the mute nature of the ambiguous present. The past dwells in the present, and the present seeks its past not only through the characters' lives but also through the director's appropriation of Turkish classical melodrama and selfreflexive filmmaking. *Innocence* is Zeki Demirkubuz's second feature, and the genesis of his most recent film, *Kader* (*Destiny*, 2006), a prequel that transforms the viewing of its original almost a decade later. *Innocence* is a turning point not only for its exceptional actors and the skillful storytelling that evokes mid-1990s melodrama, but also in the way that it attempts to rethink and misplace the tradition of melodrama and spectatorship in and outside the film's world. Instead of settling its characters and audience in a predestined life that epitomizes the structure of classical melodrama, *Innocence* leaves them incomplete and unsettled.

The film starts with Yusuf (Güven Kıraç) in prison, on the day of his release. The warden reads his letter requesting to stay: Yusuf has "no place to go." The reading of the letter and the discussion of the rationality of this request is interrupted by a door that opens and closes repeatedly. This motif of doors that will not close is a device that the filmmaker uses in succeeding films with varying functions. Here, it reveals framed and multiple realities; it serves as the crack in the boundary between exteriors and interiors—between the unsettling rules of the external world and the characters that have long since lost their ease. As Yusuf steps into his new life in a hotel where he will meet Bekir (Haluk Bilginer) and Uğur (Derya Alabora), we are introduced to a world of other people like him who have "no place to go," who sit in the lobbies of cheap hotels and watch old Turkish melodramas on TV. The lobbies are like courtyards of non-places, of no belonging. The old films in the background set a fictional past for these people who live in a timeless and circular present. For twenty years, Bekir follows Uğur wherever she goes, while Uğur follows her often-jailed lover wherever

he goes, in a never ending circle that is destined to continue as Yusuf slowly finds his place in this order.

The significance of *Innocence* resides in its believability. Having captured a limited national and international audience, yet highly acclaimed by the critics, the film resists time and becomes a locus that is enriched with *Destiny*. We keep revisiting this locus: the locus of love, belonging, suffering, and an impossible desire that tears apart the preconceived, predestined pattern of life. Through the cracks of reality, *Innocence* demands a quest for truth where truth can only be found in love.

Övgü Gökçe, *Altyazı*

Üçüncü Sayfa / The Third Page

1999, 92 minutes
Written and directed by Zeki Demirkubuz
Cinematography by Ali Utku
Edited by Nevzat Dişiaçık
Starring Ruhi Sarı, Başak Köklükaya, Cengiz Sezici and Serdar Orçin

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky writes, "If God doesn't exist, everything is permitted." Demirkubuz, who frequently refers to Dostoyevsky's influence on his stories, builds a godless world but with two innocent characters: İsa (Jesus) and Meryem (Mary). The innocence of the characters in *Üçüncü Sayfa* (*The Third Page*, 1999) is underlined first and foremost by their names, despite their betrayals, lies, even murders. "The third page" is a special term in Turkish journalism which refers to the news published on page three of the tabloids, featuring shocking crime stories, usually from the lower classes. *The Third Page* demolishes the grammar of this third page newspaper writing, using a story with a typical page three quality to it.

The narrative is built between an unsuccessful suicide attempt and a successful one. İsa, who makes his living as an extra in movies, is in trouble with the poky mafia of the poor neighborhood for not paying back the money he owes them. Out of hopelessness, he points a gun to his head and waits for the moment when he is brave enough to die. But when he fires his gun a few minutes later, he does not shoot himself but his landlord. From this murder on, the gun seeks one target after another and the notion of death envelops the whole narrative. While İsa endeavors to survive, he points the gun at various targets, but not himself. Finally, the idea of death rotates to its origin and this time points to İsa.

The world of *The Third Page* is visually gloomy. However, this is not a stylish darkness. The mafia, the perfect murder, and the *femme fatale* are narrated in an unvarnished style. They are lit with realistic darkness. While forcing İsa to pay them, the mafia takes up time in the movie to ask about the exchange rate of the Turkish Lira with the U.S. dollar. While perfect murder plans fail, an unplanned and unreasonable murder occurs spontaneously over a simple gambling dispute. At the end of the film, the *femme fatale* appears as innocent as İsa. All these build a narrative that refrains from stylizing characters, events or feelings to suit aesthetic preference.

Although the film sets a realistic feeling through the narration, it points to the concept of fiction. For instance, the television is usually on in the background, calling attention to similar stories of different people. We see the set of the series in which İsa is an extra. Through these self-reflexive elements, the film could be read as deconstructing its own realistic approach. However, the most effective use of this self-reflexivity makes another reading possible. We watch the extras portraying themselves, talking about their dreams in the cast shootings. While listening to these people amidst the story of İsa, we realize something about real life: people seeking their roles in life, struggling to define themselves, are just like extras seeking lead roles. So, while underlining the notion of fiction, *The Third Page* exposes the fiction within real life. When it is İsa's turn, he says that his dream is to get the lead role in a movie; he wants to perform "a surviving man despite all his suffering." That is what he attempts to do in real life, after he meets Meryem. Had Meryem not deceived him, the film would have had a happy ending with İsa taking the role he had always dreamt about. But the script (or destiny) does not allow this dream. Therefore, İsa quits performing as he could not find a part at all. As the film ends in absolute darkness, we come to think that not a single dream comes true in such a dark world. Here, everybody falls behind life.

Ayça Çiftçi, *Altyazı*

Yazgı / Fate

Yazgı / Fate

2001, 120 minutes
Written, directed and edited by Zeki Demirkubuz
Cinematography by Ali Utku
Art direction by Bahar Engin
Starring Serdar Orçin, Zeynep Tokuş and Engin Günaydın

In his films, Zeki Demirkubuz dives recklessly into the fundamental contradictions of life without being afraid of falling into deep and basic controversies. He passionately searches for his humanness in the darkness. *Yazgı* (*Fate*, 2001), the first film in his trilogy "Tales of Darkness," offers a controversial interpretation of Albert Camus's literary classic of alienation, *The Stranger*.

The title of the film refers to a central, recurring motif in Demirkubuz's cinema: destiny. His latest masterpiece carries a similar name, *Kader* (*Destiny*, 2006). Both of these words signify destiny while *Fate* especially underlines predetermination. "Written on my forehead," a frequently used colloquial saying in Turkish, signifies a mode of thinking connected to the more Islamic way of resigning oneself to God. The gist of the film lies in its interpretation of the discourse of apathy and socially detached individuality in *The Stranger* as an unchangeable destiny. For Demirkubuz, the darkness of the underground is a fate to be borne by human beings in life.

In name, our anti-hero Musa (Serdar Orçin)—surely one of the personas of the director himself—echoes Meursault and the prophet Moses. He lives alone with his mother in a lower class neighborhood in Istanbul and works in an ordinary customs office. He has simple but persistent habits, and his taciturn and distanced attitude reveals itself in his standard reply to all questions: "I don't care, it's all equal to me." Contrary to expectations, things happen in the course of the film but do not lead to catharsis or epiphany for Musa. He does not react to finding his mother dead in her bed one day. He does not care that he is marrying a young woman he does not like or even care to get to know. He shows no reaction when he is sentenced to life in prison for three murders he did not commit. Fleshed out marvelously by Serdar Orçin, Musa carries the same disinterested and blank attitude throughout the entire film, which makes it difficult for the audience to identify with him. Since Demirkubuz understands the nihilism of the underground as the main critique of the morals of society, of what is deemed good and evil in life, he presents Musa's absurd apathy not as an adopted behavior but as a critical frame of

mind that he has had from the beginning as a radical choice about life. Musa is a silent spokesman interrogating the hypocrisy of values, vice, guilt, and the pseudo-correctness of society's morality.

The power of *Fate* comes from Demirkubuz's confrontation with his audience's expectations, both morally and cinematically. In a long dialogue near the end of the film, Demirkubuz explains his stance on developing a film such as this, and through Musa's words he challenges the audience by asking them the source of Musa's guilt: Is Musa guilty of homicide now or of not being sad about his mother's death? Demirkubuz persistently escapes the clichés of psychologically-oriented films. While escaping them, he uses seemingly under-elaborated visual aesthetics that never overwhelm his effective storytelling, but instead nourish it. In the end, it is impossible not to react to what he does in *Fate*: He thrives on the fundamental question of what is beyond good and evil, and urges the audience to look into their own darkness through his controversial, archetypal individual of modernity, coming this time not from France but from Turkey.

Övül Durmuşoğlu, *Altyazı*

İtiraf / Confession

İtiraf / Confession

2001, 91 minutes
Written, directed and edited by Zeki Demirkubuz
Cinematography by Zeki Demirkubuz
Starring Taner Birsel and Başak Köklükaya

Zeki Demirkubuz's fifth film, *İtiraf* (*Confession*, 2001), takes Turkey's capital city Ankara as its primary setting. A rare choice for a Turkish filmmaker, Ankara (unlike cosmopolitan Istanbul) is a city known for its large middle class composed mainly of government officials and bureaucrats. The somewhat dull atmosphere of Ankara finds its reflection in the gloomy, claustrophobic internal shots that make up most of the film. Demirkubuz's trademark scenes with television sets in hotel rooms and doors that constantly open and close are also present here, but to a lesser degree. And, as in his other films, long intense monologues update viewers on off-screen plot developments.

An engineer in his late thirties, Harun (Taner Birsel), suspects his wife, Nilgün (Başak Köklükaya), of being unfaithful. When the uncertainty becomes unbearable, he cuts short a business trip to Istanbul and abruptly returns home to Ankara, unannounced. His worries are confirmed when he overhears his wife whispering on the phone to someone he does not know. During a tense dinner in a classy restaurant, Harun forces Nilgün to confess what he believes he already knows. This acrimonious dispute is followed by a long and torturous process of physical and psychological violence, which reveals that the couple's marriage rests on a mutual feeling of guilt towards their deceased friend Taylan, who committed suicide some years earlier. Over the course of the film, it becomes clear that the "confession" refers both to Harun's desperate struggle to make Nilgün confess her infidelity and his irresistible drive to confess what he deems a sin to Taylan's family.

Confession, the second installment in the director's "Tales of Darkness" trilogy, strives to unveil the darkness of the human soul and the potential evil that lies within it. Harun's constant torturing of himself and his wife, Nilgün's infidelity and her refusal to confess, and the couple's inability to engage in any kind of genuine communication with each other offer an extremely pessimistic view of human nature. Nevertheless, the film can also be interpreted as one about the weakness, or even the fragility of the human psyche. All the evil that is done

is the result of the characters' weakness and vulnerability. Harun's insistence on making his wife confess is directly connected to his own guilt about his responsibility in relation to his best friend's suicide.

In a recent interview which is reproduced at the end of this catalog, Demirkubuz says, "I think two high level positions must be created: shame and confession. I believe that a better life could be built only on these two positions. Neither the development of technology nor modernity can solve the problems of humanity in the absence of shame and confession, which are the greatest inventions of humankind—the most sublime levels that humanity can ever reach." In *Confession*, the shame and guilt carried in their hearts destroy Harun and Nilgün's relationship and their lives. Ironically however, confronting this guilt is what liberates them and provides them with a slight possibility to start anew.

What can make us evil, is what makes us human. This is why, despite all the darkness and the misery, it is possible to catch a fleeting glimpse of hope in the sad and uncertain ending of the film.

Berke Göl, *Altyazı*

Bekleme Odası / The Waiting Room

Bekleme Odası / The Waiting Room

2003, 88 minutes
Written, directed and edited by Zeki Demirkubuz
Cinematography by Zeki Demirkubuz
Starring Zeki Demirkubuz, Nurhayat Kavrak, Nilüfer Açıkalın and Serdar Orçin

In *Bekleme Odası* (*The Waiting Room,* 2003), Zeki Demirkubuz tries to disconnect himself from his aesthetic concerns and stylistic attachments in order to deliver a film that unmasks the mythical approach to auteurism and intellectual intensity. In other words, the film demystifies the idea of the intellectual film director in a rather vulgar manner. Through its consciously inelegant minimalism and distractive spectacle editing, *The Waiting Room* unpolishes the mystified reality of the auteur director, not only by revealing him in the most casual and ordinary situations, but also by cutting loose from all the predetermined ways of aestheticizing everyday banality.

The film is about a director, Ahmet, who is played by Zeki Demirkubuz, and the problems he faces in his personal life during the project development process of his new film, an adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Captured by a strong and baseless feeling of apathy, Ahmet disconnects himself from everything in his life that makes (or may make) sense: He lies to his wife by saying that he cheats, he cancels his new film project, he forces his assistant—who is in love with him—to hate him by denying any kind of emotional bond between them. The process he goes through can be defined as a strong and insuppressible urge for self-destruction and avoidance of all rational connections with life.

The Waiting Room is foremost about the arbitrary nature of life but it is also about a man's inability to maintain a Dostoyevskian intensity in the present. Throughout the movie, Dostoyevsky's portrait hanging on the wall reminds us of the enormous gap between Ahmet's great expectations for capturing the existential intensity of *Crime and Punishment* and his present life which does not sustain such profoundness. His everyday life, degraded by the sublime object of literature, loses all its meaning to him. Drifting through a vacuum of causeless flow, he reluctantly clings to the arbitrariness around him by casting a thief (who he catches in the backyard of his apartment) for the role of Raskolnikov and making love with the women who visit him. The nature of his relationship with women points to one of the most important themes of *The*

Waiting Room: the search for absolute honesty and truthfulness. Ahmet's rude attitude towards his wife and his assistant is not a signifier of his sexual competency, but an extreme desire to maintain honesty in relationships; it is a desire so extreme that it sometimes pushes him to cross the line between truth and deceit. Hence, we should underline the fact that this is not a film about a man's indifference toward life; it is about a man who thinks of indifference as a pathway to genuineness.

Of course, Demirkubuz's denial of aesthetics and beauty in the cinematic sense, corresponds with Ahmet's search for purity and openness. This is probably one of the reasons why he chose to play the character himself. However, *The Waiting Room* should not be mistaken for an autobiographical film, not in the classic sense. The director we see in this film is not Zeki Demirkubuz, but a reflection of his effort to face and reveal the evil in himself. In the interview concluding this publication, Demirkubuz says that speaking evil and manifesting the innermost evil thoughts—even if you do not necessarily have them—is a precondition for anyone who wants to form an honest, reliable and genuine communication with others. Consequently, *The Waiting Room* is his effort to develop a genuine communication with the viewer. It is his confession of his inability to capture the existential depth of *Crime and Punishment*. Yet, this does not mean that he will not try to adapt the novel, as the last scene of the film shows: a director who starts to write his script again, this time not as an adaptation of the novel, but as a script about not being able to adapt it. In effect, what we have seen is precisely this film, titled *The Waiting Room*.

Fırat Yücel, *Altyazı*

Kader / Destiny

Kader / Destiny

2006, 103 minutes
Written, directed and edited by Zeki Demirkubuz
Cinematography by Zeki Demirkubuz
Music by Edward Artemiev
Starring Ufuk Bayraktar, Vildan Atasever, Engin Akyürek, Müge Ulusoy, Ozan Bilen, Settar Tanrıöğen, Erkan Can, Mustafa Uzunyılmaz, Güzin Alkan, Hikmet Demir and Gönül Çalgan

We have heard the story of *Kader* (*Destiny*, 2006) before, long before we first saw the movie. It was told to us, almost ten years ago, by Bekir (Haluk Bilginer), one of the main characters in *Masumiyet* (*Innocence*, 1997), in a long—and almost immediately legendary—monologue. It was the story of how Bekir first met Uğur, how he fell for her immediately, and how he followed her from one city to another as his obsession grew stronger and stronger. While Bekir pursues Uğur, she goes after another man, Zagor, who is continuously transported from one prison to another, for he cannot stop committing crimes. *Destiny*, tells the story of this impossible love triangle and follows their journey all along the way.

The film opens in Bekir's father's carpet shop. Uğur walks into the store, awakens Bekir from his nap and (knowingly or unknowingly) seduces him. Bekir instantly falls in love with her and soon after learns the story of Uğur and Zagor. It is very hard to tell whether Bekir's obsession is with Uğur, or the impossible situations that she gets herself into, and which breathe passion and desire into her life by somehow defining and giving meaning to her existence.

Chronologically, the story of *Destiny,* should be set in the 1980s as it is the prequel to *Innocence*. However, Demirkubuz sets the film in the present, in an immediate and timeless present that is beyond history, beyond linear time. It is a story about love, desire and obsession, all of which belong to time unbound. Since these notions exist outside chronological time, the experiences that come with these feelings are equally timeless.

Destiny can also be considered a road movie. However, unlike many films that deal with the idea of the journey, these characters are not on a voyage of self-discovery but instead seek to escape from themselves—to give up, to let go, to forget themselves in a fully imprisoned state of the other. Therefore, these characters can never acquire the objects of their desire, because desire has no particular object and so can never fully be satisfied. What's more, they are not

actually willing to fulfill their desires. They are hunting for an indeterminate experience, this impossible journey; in short they are in search of desire itself.

Near the end of the film, Bekir says to Uğur: “In this fucking world, everyone has something to believe in, and *I* believe in *you.*” Strikingly, Bekir defines his obsession as belief. In a slightly different scenario, one where Bekir had not met Uğur, he would have become the man who married the woman his parents had picked for him and would have worked in the furniture shop that his father had opened for him. We cannot help but think of this alternate scenario every time Bekir unwillingly returns home, but never manages to stay there. It is hard, therefore, to claim that he would have been a free man if he had never met and become a prisoner of Uğur. At first sight, the title *Destiny* makes us think that Bekir is destined for Uğur and he cannot escape this destiny. But on a second thought, it is Uğur who is an escape for him from his predestined life, a life determined for him by his family, by the society. Bekir’s fixation on Uğur seems to him to be the only way to break away from his destiny. It is freedom for him, hidden within an absolute imprisonment.

Senem Aytaç, *Altyazı*

Prison as Metaphor Is The Guiding Light of This Turkish Director's Austere, Literary Vision*

Turkey isn't exactly a renowned hotbed of filmmaking talent. So when Zeki Demirkubuz had not just one but two films selected for the "Un Certain Regard" section at Cannes last year there was good reason to be curious. As it turned out, a major new auteur had arrived; five months later the Viennale '02 confirmed this with the first complete retrospective of his work.

Demirkubuz's oeuvre is a dense one: five films in eight years, steadily developing towards an ever clearer vision of the world, his images increasingly stripped of all overly expressive frills and pretensions. Each film circles around the same themes and obsessions, all of them variations on the same question: Is life driven by fate or by free will, and to what extent is the decision to let fate reveal itself actually a choice? Where does freedom come into it? It's the kind of question someone who has served time as a political prisoner might ask. Demirkubuz, who was born in 1964, was jailed at the age of 17 for alleged communist ties. Judging from his films, the freedom he regained three years later seems merely relative. The title of his first film, *C Blok* (*Block-C*, 1994), suggests a prison movie but actually refers to part of a high-rise apartment complex in Istanbul's Ataköy district, where Demirkubuz grew up. Yet each subsequent film is haunted by the metaphor of prison.

Demirkubuz says that he came to filmmaking more by chance than by design. After being released from prison, he needed a job and happened to find one in the film industry, not so surprising for somebody who studied communications. He became an assistant director, and worked often for the great Zeki Ökten. And yet, despite his admiration for Kurosawa, Ford and Bresson, Demirkubuz doesn't regard cinema as the greatest of all art forms. For him it's literature, above all Dostoyevsky, about whose work this agreeable but somewhat reclusive guy can talk for hours on end. Demirkubuz's cinematic grammar has a distinctly literary feeling to it, his narratives broken up into precise chapters often beginning with the opening of a door from within a darkened interior (quite Bresson-ian, this door obsession). His scenes are beautifully paced, and his cuts change tempo like semicolons; certain recurring scenes, especially confessions and interrogations, often feel like parentheses within the films' overall structure.

When Demirkubuz thought he was ready (and free enough) to make a film himself, he started from scratch. He opened his own production house, Mavi Filmcilik Ltd., situating himself outside of Istanbul's mainstream Yesilçam Studios (Turkey's equivalent to Hollywood, nonetheless a constant point of reference in his early work) and shot *Block-C* with a small crew and minuscule budget. Looking back, Demirkubuz reckons that there's too much Yesilçam in this first, astonishing effort: too much music, too many "filmic" (i.e., overtly expressive, self-serving) images, too many dramaturgical concessions to popular taste, among them several comic interludes, and a charming sex scene. (Though he's never shot another of those, sex—especially of the illicit variety—is an important factor in all of his films.)

Block-C remains Demirkubuz's only film in which the main character is a woman. Tülay lives a comfortable life of indifference with her husband, Selim, in one of *Block-C*'s apartments. Her maid, Aslı, enjoys the occasional roll in the hay with Halet, the janitor's slow but observant son. One day Tülay comes home early and the sight of them going at it triggers something inside her. She starts to drift around Istanbul, looking for something, finding emptiness, obscene gestures, and men too timid to seduce her. Meanwhile Selim and Aslı watch TV: There's always something interesting on, something that soothes the pain of being the maid, the husband—of being, period. The only thing that soothes Tülay, finally is Halet. Do things change? Yes. Do they really? No. The superficial "yes" is sociology cum psychoanalysis, the narratives of society, television but "no" is the essence of things, that which Demirkubuz's art makes visible though its light (always cold, frozen, in winters of discontent), spatial configurations (people rarely look at each other and are united only in their mutual avoidance, like sleepwalking co-conspirators),

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rhythm (the flow of the editing carries a sense of destiny), not forgetting the actors' unique presences, which etch themselves into the celluloid.

It took Demirkubuz three years to mount his next production, *Masumiyet* (*Innocence*, 1997), which in a weird way feels like a kind of mirror-sequel to *Block-C*. Its protagonist, Yusuf, is a variation on Halet: he's not so much slow as emotionally stymied after serving ten years for killing his married sister's lover. Yusuf doesn't want to leave prison and threatens to commit murder so that he can go back inside; the warden tells him to fuck off. Needing a place to stay, he first visits his sister and her abusive husband, leading him to conclude that maybe he killed the wrong man. Back on the road, Yusuf encounters a strange couple: Uğur, a singer, and her boyfriend Bekir, plus their silent daughter. Uğur, as we learn in a trademark Demirkubuz confession scene, bathed in honey sunlight, is actually in love with a man who is in prison. Yusuf is only a bystander in the drama that unfolds, but he's the one who picks up the pieces. It's his condition, the tarnished innocence of someone who's afraid to commit himself to life, that supplies the film's strangely upbeat feel of tidy melodrama. This, again, is ironically reflected in the snippets of Yesilçam films seen on those ever-present TV screens (in front of which the little girl is parked each evening): violent melodramas about protagonists chained to their destinies but lacking the depth to blossom as true characters. With its construction of multiple impossible triangles, *Innocence* is Demirkubuz's most doom-laden film—although in its overall mood it's possibly his most loose and uplifting.

Üçüncü Sayfa (*The Third Page*, 1999) which competed in Locarno that year, was Demirkubuz's breakthrough, and ironically it's his only real genre movie. It's a masterpiece, like a less lurid Cornell Woolrich story spun from an anecdote found on page three of a Turkish daily—hence the film's title. İsa, a soap-opera extra, is accused by his studio boss of having pocketed $50. The landlord pops up and wants his due, so İsa, in a fit of rage, shoots him dead. When the studio goons show up, İsa's neighbor, Meryem, who has serious problems of her own in the form of an abusive husband, saves his ass and proposes a deal. *The Third Page* is intricately plotted and perfectly paced, full of outlandish setpieces reminiscent of the shoddiest daytime television intrigues. The film has a certain exuberance, a relaxed quality that offsets the film's taut construction, and it gives Demirkubuz the opportunity to shoot the only comic scene in his entire oeuvre.

The first two installments of Demirkubuz's "Tales of Darkness" trilogy feel like an emotional step backward, but cinematically they represent a bold move forward. Demirkubuz told me that "Tales of Darkness" could be the subtitle for all of his film, but I'm not so sure: *Block-C*, *Innocence*, and *The Third Page* certainly have their share of despair and bleak moments, but they also have cracks through which warmer feelings seep in. There are no cracks in *Yazgı*, (*Fate,* 2001) and *İtiraf* (*Confession*, 2001). Both are exercises in unrelenting miserabilism and hardcore existentialism with an ironic oriental-modernist twist. *Fate* is a literal adaptation of Camus's *The Stranger* with a Dostoyevsky makeover—which seems fair, as Dostoyevsky was one of Camus's major influences. Moreover, the dialogue between protagonist Meursault and the priest—here between Musa and the warden—seems closer in spirit to the "Grand Inquisitor" chapter in The *Brothers Karamazov* than to Camus. But in its assertion of the utter terror of freedom it's something else: there's a cockiness to Musa's indifference that's far from both Meursault and Stavrogin. There is nothing liberating about his choice to choose: Musa, who does not die in this version, is more or less an abyss. Just compare him to Halet and Yusuf and you'll understand the difference between the "Tales of Darkness" and Demirkubuz's earlier films. *Confession* goes one step further: Husband Harun suspects his wife Nilgün of having an affair. He spies on her, confronts her about it, verbally tortures her worse than any jailer. Their love ends there, even if they seem to reconcile. In the end, there's nothing left. *Fate* and *Confession* are like voids carved from marble, essays about structuring absences—visions of evil that make you long for and strive for goodness. In the end these films represent the possibility of salvation beyond God.

Olaf Möller

There Should be a Door...*

In Zeki Demirkubuz's film *Innocence*, a door thumps incessantly without ever closing. From the first sequence, filmed in shot and counter-shot, a judge or the director of the prison—it is never quite specified, but it doesn't matter because very quickly we understand that the filmmaker cares only for the essentials of the narrative—reads aloud a statement handed to him by a detainee, a singularly shapeless man. The spectator learns that the silent man, whose letter is being read and who has just served a ten-year sentence, does not wish to leave prison because he does not know where to go. And thus the opening of the film goes straight to the heart of the matter, indecorous and quite cheeky, as if the film were a documentary, say Raymond Depardon's *Délits flagrants* (*Caught in the Acts*). The set-up, almost identical, mirrors what is being said and what is read on the two faces. And yet, this is a fiction film. It is what the door says, beating tirelessly and which the judge will try to close without succeeding, twice. We will find it again, that door, once at the police station, other times in hotel rooms. And when it is not all together there, its dogged resistance remains as if it were meant to underline that everything in this world conspires to make society shut its eyes to the dirtiest secrets, and yet fails. The door opens. What if a mysterious pull were to resist its shutting? And what if this pull were cinema itself? That is for every spectator to decide, but it is sufficient for the filmmaker to have been there, behind these doors, to say there is far more than a news item in today's Turkey.

With a curious hero that has not said a word yet, and who will utter but a few until the end, the film, although resolutely laconic, seems to alert the spectator: "Beware, I am in the process of revealing a story, open your eyes wide, it might very well go further than the story of this poor fellow." For real. With the request for an extension of his sentence rejected, this puny man, his gait always slightly tucked (an admirable actor), finds himself journeying on a long wander from east to west. His voyage will carry him to Anatolia, where he spent years of youth and time in jail. And to Istanbul, where he finds a cellmate who has escaped and promised to help. And then, with a curious knot in the story, and gorgeous twist in the script, he will come to meet a raggedy cabaret singer, her daughter and her protector. The woman renders services, mounting the stages of grubby bars just as often as beds in squalid hotels. Stout and beautiful, she is loved by the guardian who watches her give herself to others. She is a woman who holds secret a love that only the end of the film will reveal, too late for bliss to flower. She is wild, not unlike the film.

Days flow unhurriedly from hotel rooms to rackety buses, impassive. Like the unspeaking hero and the young mute girl, entrusted to his care in the absence of her parents away on business or in prison, time passes in an unsettling stillness. This carefully wrought quietude is interrupted by unexpected draws of excessive love, violent, ferocious, irrepressible, excessive desire, and hate in excess that is barely muffled by hypocrisy. A woman locks her two hands on her underbelly, flinging foreword her sex in defiance of a man trampled by a sacrosanct ache, inherited from long ago in these Mediterranean lands—an ache that runs as far back in history as the fear of Menades, the ancient adepts of Dionysos whom the gods rendered crazy about their bodies. A man kills himself because he could not push any further his insult and injury to those he loved in excess. Another man walks home, feet bludgeoned by beatings given by the police, even though he is innocent.

Bursts of fury mark the storyline of this film, other moments too, as striking and bright, although more rare. There are moments when tenderness shines softly, infused with nostalgia. A woman's hand caresses a man's hair. A man, the most bitter of the lot, scorched by life, recounts his happy childhood in a public garden while a little girl plays not far from him. Instances when peacefulness is suspended, but listening to his story who can foretell what future awaits her? These ruptures in the tone of a film crafted like an outline in its denunciation of a ruthless society but peopled with beings made of flesh and blood, say all too well that Zeki Demirkubuz knows where he wants to go, from his first film. His very brief note in the press kit about his quest for "meaning to life" is therefore not surprising: "When you give such meaning to life, the fact of making films becomes an ethical problem. Obviously, there is no space for such comportments in this day and age. Cinema, defined as chiefly a commercial activity, linked to numbers of spectators, forces films to turn to the rest of the world and to please a majority."

Émile Breton

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Photograph by Sevgi Ortaç

Interview with Zeki Demirkubuz:
"Neither the development of technology nor modernity can solve the problems of humanity in the absence of shame and confession."*

During an interview you once said you did not like cinema. Does the reasoning behind that comment reflect an attitude of not taking this business too seriously and placing life—what is actually experienced— front and center?

No, it is too simple. That comment was definitely not made about the meaning of cinema. I like cinema; in fact, beyond that, I see it as something miraculous. This is because abstract concepts that would pass unnoticed by most people in daily life attract my attention. This can be a story, a picture, a human face or a feeling... I get obsessed with it and I keep thinking about it; I turn it into a story, connect it to a theme, I write a script about it, then I find money for that script, I find the actors, shoot the film, and finally present it to an audience. This effort brings out something bigger, loftier than the feeling of reality. For the transient realities of daily life keep shifting and yet, when captured on film, they gain longevity, if not permanence. Something this abstract is transformed into something that is this real. Or from a more spiritual point of view, I take various quirks and compulsions that people deem worthless or embarrassing and make them into movies to present to the public. This is why I like cinema so much and consider it to be miraculous. This intense experience I have on the streets, on the road, when I'm writing at night or when I'm by myself, is my deepest bond with cinema.

The problems start when I set out to transform onto film these intense emotions/obsessions/observations. In my opinion, cinema is not a collective endeavor but something that is accomplished with other people. I find this necessary process burdensome. I am a stubborn person who works to get what he wants to the end. And one does not share the same feelings with others all the time. For some, cinema is a springboard—a tool to create

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their own legend. I am in a position to understand this, but it spoils that enchanting solitude I've been talking about. And then there's the final phase that troubles me—the phase when the film is consumed from an ideological or financial perspective. Since I cannot create a world of my own beyond all of these issues, I have to be a part of this one. I, too, have to make the audience watch my films by advertising and selling tickets. It is the distance I feel to all of this that makes me say, "I might stop making films." Sometimes this urge becomes so strong that I end up questioning the very essence of the whole process. At that moment I feel the need to say that directorship or cinema are not identities I feel burdened with. I do what I do because I believe in the things that I've said since the beginning of this interview. If the present conditions become ethically unbearable for me, then I would quit. My comments on this issue were conditional. For now, I still have the strength to continue in the way that I want to; I am not making films in spite of myself, and I don't experience big ethical dilemmas when I make films. If the time comes when I no longer possess the strength to meet these criteria I've set for my filmmaking, I would stop.

Destiny, unlike *Fate*, comes across as a film which does not seek answers, but is dedicated to the story, to the reality of the character.

In fact, *Fate* is such a film as well, but its final scene leaves people somewhat confused. Beyond the dominance of the words in that scene, there's nothing there that was done with the purpose of being didactic or giving certain answers. The dialogue in that scene does not lead anywhere; one cannot even find a main point in such a conversation. But the scene became prominent with the way the words were communicated, and the feelings that they evoked. I also wanted to test the intellectual audience a little bit with that scene. If one does not pay attention, one may get the impression that a lesson is being taught, and that everything was being explained. You may call it a trap. It is true that the words are said there with a certain logic and reflect a certain attitude; there is such a thing as taking sides in life. The prosecutor in particular is a devoted Muslim, a good, traditional man. But especially what Musa says does not go anywhere and his words are nothing more than an attack that aims to invalidate every ideology, that is, all the answers. However, *Destiny* has the quality of being totally dedicated to the story, of being true to the story. In fact, that is the reason why I gave the title of *Fate* to one, and *Destiny* to the other. Fate is in fact a more modern, more intellectual concept than destiny. References to "the fate of humanity" had always caught my attention, especially in Dostoyevsky's novels. Destiny, on the other hand, is more oriental; it carries within itself an association with the situation that the story talks about, and finds a meaning within a context. We say "This is my destiny," but refer to "the fate of humanity."

One tends to search for overarching reasons, but sometimes the reason can simply be a single act. When discussing the final scene of *The Waiting Room* many people say: "A woman came by, and the director somehow ended up sleeping with her. It's that simple." But many others also perceive and try to explain the scene as reflecting a happy mood following a one-night stand.

I wouldn't know. Among all the films that I have made, *Fate* is certainly the one I like most because it has given me the excitement of presenting a problem, and of almost catching "that feeling of life." Yet *The Waiting Room* is the film in which I've been able to strip away life's clichés the most, presenting only the plainest, simplest, driest and most straightforward aspects of life. In *The Waiting Room*, I tried to explore the reasons behind the themes that I had addressed before through other people, other stories—how liberating could telling lies be, and how the strongest faith and sense of morality can reveal an arrogance from deep within. It may surprise you to find out that my source of inspiration for *The Waiting Room* was the Bible. I used to read the Bible a lot because of Dostoyevsky. In the scene of his death, Jesus says, about the soldier stabbing him, "Father, forgive him; for he does not know what he is doing." Taking it from the religious point of view, you might be tempted to consider this as virtue or the noble

side of humanity. However, being the skeptic that I am, I asked myself: Here you have Jesus, spat on, humiliated, tortured and eventually killed; and it was the soldiers who murdered him. Despite all of this, how could Jesus, in this pitiable state, turn this situation around and pity the soldiers? As for the answer, beyond all that Jesus stood for, I also see great arrogance and a "holier than thou" attitude. I came to realize that a lot of other people and I acted the same in similar situations. The source of inspiration for the long dialogue scene between the director and the young woman's boyfriend is the Crucifixion scene. In that scene, the boyfriend praises the director for his ethical stance and his work. The director responds by saying it all arises from his arrogance and self-centeredness, and that in reality, he does not believe in anything. He says his filmmaking and his virtuous stance do not come from his faith in virtue but rather from his arrogance. I thought this dialogue gave me the opportunity to put forward an important issue. The film also carries the weight of the feeling of arbitrariness or going with the flow. These are the things I believe in most in life. Of course people have a will, a lot of passion, a purpose, et cetera, but there also is the flow of life, which is some sort of a destiny and it matters.

To transfer all these ideas onto film is more exciting for me than to have shot *Destiny. Destiny* is based on a great story, to which no one can be indifferent, whereas *Fate* and *The Waiting Room* are based on the abstract, the vague and the uncertain. When I look at it from a moral point of view, it I find worthy of respect that a director takes all these risks that are inherent in making such films. Those films may not be as good or powerful as the others, but I find them worthier of my respect.

In *Confession* and *The Third Page*, too, you told tales of obsessive love and jealousy ending in suicide. However, *Destiny* seems to be in a different place. Most film critics agree that when compared with the other films you have made, *Destiny* and *Innocence* represent a more passionate and dramatic side. What differentiates *Confession* and *Destiny* from each other?

I think not only those but all of my films are quite similar to each other, even *Block-C,* the film that I stand most distant from and I criticize most harshly. There is nothing incomprehensible about this; they all come from the same person. *Block-C*, too, is the story of a woman who searches for a belief—for love—through sex. And that film ends with a scene in a psychiatric ward where the woman faces the man she loves; she has accepted certain things at that point. That scene is quite similar to the final scene in *Destiny.* All of my films, including *Fate* and *The Waiting Room*, are thematically similar to each other. The characters in *Fate* and *The Waiting Room* are unbelievers in contrast with the characters in the other films, but they are also people who suffer because of their need to believe, and their search for something to believe in. However, I do understand the reasons why people evaluate my films the way you have described and I don't have any objections to that. At the end of the day, those opinions stem from other people who have different personalities and come from different experiences. But the fact that I understand such statements does not mean that I accept them. Looking at it from this perspective, I can say that *Innocence* and *Destiny* are perceived as such because they address the concept of an ideal more directly and in a more positive manner, and because they are closer to the traditions, values and ideals of our society. It is always easier to side with something positive. I have no personal expectations. However, if I had any expectations, I would have wanted *Fate*, *Confession* and *The Waiting Room* to be found worthy of more respect because they choose the more difficult path of questioning these issues, of searching, and of telling a story by placing evil in the center. But just the opposite happened, and as I've said, this is understandable. And then there's this: The people of the modern world do not base their objections on what they've lost; they do not agonize over them. Instead, they carry within themselves a more rational sense of life. In spite of that, as individuals, there are a lot of things that they miss and long for in their souls. Love and passion are on top of that list. They feel the lack of such intense passion —in any form and at any cost. That, too, makes *Innocence* and *Destiny* more liked. In fact, one of the reasons why I paid extra attention to create a feeling of distance in my later films was my impression that the attention *Innocence* received was

something to be questioned. I wanted to question *Innocence*'s popularity. Because of their stories, it is much easier to like and to feel close to *Innocence* and *Destiny.* Otherwise, in these films, and especially in *Destiny*, I have of course tried to maintain the distance that goes hand in hand with storytelling. In spite of all that, those films were more popular and better liked because of the story, and because the audience could feel empathy towards the characters, whereas *Confession* is a film that attempts to talk about the search for belief through betrayal—a film that talks about the most inferior sides of a human being and presents its subject matter by selecting two anti-heroes. Anti-heroes are always risky because the audience, who is prepared to identify with a hero, cannot easily establish a connection with an anti-hero. Thus, the audience cannot develop an emotional connection with an anti-hero, but only a mental one.

Destiny mostly follows Bekir's world, but it sometimes leaves his world for other things. You leave Bekir's point of view especially in the scenes focusing on Uğur's family and the hostility between Cevat and Zagor. Did you intend to limit the story to Bekir's point of view as much as possible? How did you make the decision on where to depart from Bekir's world?

I'd like to make a genuine confession since you made a point about this: I've done this for the first time. I have obsessions as much as the criteria that I set about filmmaking. I don't make films with a divine attitude. I am a filmmaker who makes his films not with the liberties, but rather with obligations that I have or create for my own self. And this is one of those obligations. In the other films, I wouldn't leave the character whose point of view I use to follow the story, and move onto a scene or a story line that doesn't have any connection to him. And it would be very veiled if I do that. This is what I have done in six films. After a certain point though, I came to realize that this approach which had caused a lot of pain on my part, did not make much of a difference to the audience, and more importantly, to the people with whom I share similar criteria. That led me to question this obsession of mine. I'd given up on writing a lot of nice scenes because of this obsession, and nobody cared. So, I decided to leave that obsession behind with *Destiny*, and said that my previous approach might have been wrong. After *Confession* I decided that the issue was more related to form and style than to ethics or a criterion. This style is as open to abuse as to becoming an obsession. Every individual who has a sense of ethics on language is bound to face that problem. It's difficult to find a middle ground and to say "this is right." Looking at the films of Bresson and Ozu, I realize that they don't lead to a divine pride with an "I see everything, I know everything, and I can do whatever I want" attitude when the camera leaves the character. On the contrary, it helps them tell the story more effectively. On the other hand, we also observe that sometimes the technique is overdone through parallel editing and by pushing it into the audience's eyes. I think it's all a matter of balance...

Although this question has become a cliché, we, too, would like to ask you: Did you worry about being accused of misogyny once again because of the way you portrayed Uğur and her mother in *Destiny*?

That's the way it is, and there's nothing I can do about it. I cannot do anything to be liked and to be approved of, and that applies not only to cinema, but to any other area as well. I consider myself to be a rational and intelligent man, but I'm not very good at using these character traits in issues that concern the outside world. I never take into consideration how a film, even a scene could be perceived when I write. Those accusations were made, and I'm aware of them. But they don't cause me any pain. It's normal that the perception may be as such, and I don't even complain. It's also important who the accuser is. I may even enjoy the accusation of misogyny if it comes from someone who lowers the existence of a human being to a thought such as feminism. The only thing I can do for a person, who explains our whole existence from the point of view of feminism, Islam, or Marxism instead of choosing to doubt or question, would be to understand him/her. But I wouldn't be affected by such criticism. Such is life. And

we should not forget that Jesus was spat on, humiliated and killed on a cross. For months, Prophet Mohammad, stalked like a wolf, had to live in caves. Therefore, the reward of what we find valuable can never be to be understood or approved. And the reward comes with a price. That's why I have never complained about paying the price, and I don't think I ever will.

Most of this kind of criticism was made after *The Waiting Room*. One may say that you sometimes make an extraordinary effort to show the bad side of human beings, and *The Waiting Room* was the film which reflected that effort. What's the reason?

Because it's not possible to create a conscience otherwise. You may suggest a lot of things about evil, lying and crimes against humanity, but you will not be effective in this age of abundant information. For example, you may say "it is bad to kill another human being," but it will not affect anyone. However, if you start by saying "I'm a bad person" (even if you're not) to make an impression, then you may be able to create a conscience for others. The fact that you are not any different, your confession, makes it more believable and more valuable. I do that in my films, in my relationships, and even during interviews. It doesn't matter if I have the bad attributes or not; I like being accountable for them. That is the only way to establish real ties based on trust. This is the reason why the character in *The Waiting Room* is a film director, and there is a reason why he lies. It is so easy to say "lying is bad" that anyone can do it. On the other hand, everyone lies every day. If you start your conversation about lying by saying "I am a liar," you may be able to create a conscience. I see Ahmet as a very honest person. He is an unbeliever, but he passionately wants to believe. His search for a conscience is the driving force behind his abuse of women and other people. He claims he's committed adultery but he has not. Why would a reasonable person behave this way? His behavior may be a sign for his search for security. It is very normal that *The Waiting Room* would be met as it was in an area full of ideological clichés. The driving force behind *The Waiting Room* was not to make a run-of-the-mill film. I thought of my own mortality,

of my efforts to make films and tell stories, and reached the conclusion that I had to write an essay or a novel to be successful in that attempt. When I came up with *The Waiting Room*, I thought I had found a way to transfer an essay, or a Nietzsche-esque philosophical text onto film. That's why the excitement I felt while making *The Waiting Room* was more intense compared to the other films. I knew that it wouldn't do well at the box office, a lot of people would hate it, and it might cause problems in my personal life, but I still did it by spending a lot of money. I don't think anyone can make a film like *The Waiting Room* in this day and age when cinema is so engaged with ideologies. That's why I didn't search for financial support, and made the film with my own money. We'll see if another film like *The Waiting Room* will be made during our lifetime. If it happens, I'll declare the maker of that film a kindred spirit.

***The Waiting Room* focused on the masculine, and invited people to face the dark side of masculinity. This may have made the film a difficult one since explaining the meaning of such a confrontation is not an easy task.**

Yes, that's true. But, it's also a good thing. I don't believe that these issues can be understood anyway. Even if they were grasped, it wouldn't do much good. Imagine a world where everyone is good, honest and law-abiding. I'm not even sure if I'd want to live in such a colorless and dull world. When I think of the problems of humanity, of a better life, the place I arrive at is not an ideology or a system. I think two high level positions must be created: shame and confession. I believe that a better life could be built only on these two positions. Neither the development of technology nor modernity can solve the problems of humanity in the absence of shame and confession, which are the greatest inventions of humankind—the most sublime levels that humanity can ever reach. Even under ideal circumstances, no socialist or social project executed in the name of creating a better world can even approach the power of shame and confession.

Given that as a principle you stick to the script while shooting a film, on what levels did you want *Destiny*'s script to be connected to *Innocence*? What kind of a connection did you want your actors to establish?

I don't direct actors with any thoughts about the meaning of the film in mind. I know that a lot of directors spend a lot of time with their actors, but those are usually futile attempts as far as the set is concerned. It may even cause an unnecessary engagement. My approach on the set is very concrete. I don't expect my actors to know anything about the story or the subject matter of the film. I'm content if they do what I tell them to do, because actors are not responsible for creating the meaning of a film. The director is in deep trouble if he gets that involved in that area. I spend five to ten years thinking about certain issues, and write a script; it is impossible for an actor to read that script a couple of months before the shooting and be in control of every detail. An actor is usually interested in what a film will contribute to his/her personality. It would be a very stupid and fruitless effort to lay the meaning of a film on the shoulders of an actor. Scenes that display similarities to *Innocence* in acting were under my control. When I became sure that Ufuk and Vildan had the power to do whatever I wanted them to do, and they wouldn't cross the wires, I deliberately created some similarities in some scenes. A director should keep the meaning of a film to himself and regard the film at the set as a very simple and technical thing. If one plans certain things well while writing the script, the meaning comes through when the editing is done and the film is finished. It is most rewarding for me to see that the film's meaning comes back when it opens to the audience after the technical—and nauseating—shooting process, where one loses connection with the meanings that set him/her out to shoot the film. When and if a director and actors can leave these identities aside and free themselves of their various engagements, they can do incredible things. Anything can be produced if you're not afraid of uncertainty, and if uncertainty doesn't make you feel confused.

When you talk about your cinema, you make a point of talking about morality. This idea of morality seems to build a wall between you and the audience, and place you in a somewhat untouchable and unreachable place. This point has been made frequently about your relationship with the people and actors who work on the set, and with the press. In a recent interview with Ömür Gedik in *Hürriyet* you complained that everyone was very serious and people had lost their sense of fun. Don't you think you, too, contribute to the seriousness, which you find boring, with your stand?

That's different. I do put the idea of morality on the agenda, but I don't preach morality. I just declare my own morality, but I don't hold anyone responsible for my morality other than myself. I engage myself with morality, and I stubbornly continue to do this—even though I don't enjoy it very much because I think it's necessary to create a feeling of credibility and trust. But life's got more to it. I may be perceived as such, but I'm also a person who goes to soccer matches by himself to scream, laugh and curse with adolescents. I can be fun and have enough comedic sense to make a comedy film. These two should not be confused with each other. I share the joy of life with people of all ages as long as they believe in their thoughts, and are not dumb. This is reflected in my films also. What I cannot tolerate is the tendency to limit everything to codes or data, or to create images out of everything. Otherwise, it really bores me to be taken this seriously.

Your emphasizing intuition can be seen as an intellectual effort, but you seem to have a stand against intellectualism. It makes you look like an intellectual who tries not to be an intellectual...

I don't know. All I know is that I'm a good thinker. I take a simple matter and carry it with me for days, months and sometimes put it in front of the people on film. I've been like that since I was a kid. I used to lose sleep over and think about a small matter the whole night and live it again and again. If the matter had hurt my pride, I would keep feeling shame. This is different than coding thought as an abstract matter. What I object to in the definition of intellectualism is the transformation of thinking into something abstract and professional. I am a typical street urchin in the worst meaning of the word. And there is no such thing that street urchins cannot think, too. That's why I find intellectuals and the leftists in that category very distant from myself in terms of language, in terms of style, in lifestyles, and the way they maintain their relationships. I do better with radical leftists, but find the intellectual leftists very boring and keep my distance from them. Intellectualism is a lifestyle; it's a cultural thing that defines where you'll eat, what you'll read, and how you'll behave. I don't belong to that culture, but am not against it, either. I just criticize it. I don't respect any type of knowledge that lacks a feeling for life, and does not carry within itself an interpretation. In that sense, I don't feel close at all to the people who carry intellectualism as an identity. Even a vagrant man on the street evokes more of my interest.

Nadir Öperli and Fırat Yücel, *Altyazı*

The Film Society of Lincoln Center

www.filmlinc.com

The Film Society of Lincoln Center was founded in 1969 to celebrate American and international cinema, to recognize and support new filmmakers and to enhance the awareness, accessibility and understanding of film across a broad and diverse audience.

The Film Society hosts two world-class international festivals: the New York Film Festival and New Directors/New Films, co-presented by the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Film. The Film Society also presents a year-round calendar of programming at the Walter Reade Theater that includes premieres of new films from an international roster of established and emerging directors, major retrospectives, in-depth symposia, popular annual series and other high profile events. In publishing *Film Comment* magazine, which has covered the gamut of contemporary world cinema since 1962, the Film Society also offers insightful and immediate film writing to a worldwide audience.

The Film Society of Lincoln Center has been a pioneer among film institutions and one of the film world's most respected and influential arbiters of cinematic trends and discoveries. François Truffaut, R.W. Fassbinder, Jean-Luc Godard, Pedro Almodóvar, Martin Scorsese, Wong Kar-Wai, Wes Anderson—over the last four decades there is scarcely a major director who has not been introduced to American audiences by the Film Society.

ArteEast

www.areteeast.org

ArteEast is a New York-based international nonprofit organization that supports artists from the Middle East and its diasporas, raising awareness of their most significant and groundbreaking

work through public events, exhibitions, a dynamic online gallery and a resource-rich website. Its mission is to present contemporary Middle Eastern artists to a wide audience in order to foster more complex understanding of the region's arts and cultures and promote artistic excellence. It accomplishes this mission by creating, presenting and touring art and film programs, producing publications and through the arteeast.org website, which contains news, articles, arts features and program information.

Moon and Stars Project

www.moonandstarsproject.org
www.nyturkishfilmfestival.com

The Moon and Stars Project is a not-for-profit, tax-exempt organization established in 2002 to highlight the changing face of Turkish arts and culture, and to establish a two-way cultural interaction between the United States and Turkey through arts and culture festivals, concerts, performances, film events, exhibitions, grants and residency programs. We are dedicated to supporting and encouraging the finest in traditional and contemporary forms of artistic expression, and providing artists with the support and funding required to stimulate their artistic development while facilitating interaction between Turkish and American artists, professionals, and institutions.

Altyazı

www.altyazi.net
www.filmcenter.boun.edu.tr

Founded in 2001 by a group of cinephile friends, *Altyazı* is one of Turkey's leading monthlies on cinema. As an independent magazine with nationwide circulation, *Altyazı*'s mission has been to offer original and critical coverage of current cinema for Turkish audience. Keeping a focus on both mainstream and art cinema, *Altyazı* covers not only theatrical releases and festivals in Turkey, but also the international festival scene for its readers. In 2004, *Altyazı* was integrated into Boğaziçi University as Mithat Alam Film Center's publication. Since then *Altyazı* has started to play a more active role in the film culture scene in Turkey. The Zeki Demirkubuz retrospective is *Altyazı*'s first international collaboration.

With seven films in thirteen years, Zeki Demirkubuz is already a major auteur in Turkish cinema. Tackling questions of morality and faith in films with titles like *Innocence*, *Destiny* and *Confession*, Demirkubuz works on these eternal themes as he tracks his characters' intricate relationships of love and loss. *Mental Minefields: The Dark Tales of Zeki Demirkubuz* was published to coincide with a major retrospective hosted by The Film Society at Lincoln Center in New York City and introduces English-speaking audiences to the austere and brilliant cinema of Zeki Demirkubuz. With articles by international film critics, translated for the first time from Turkish and French, this collection places Demirkubuz's work in the context of Turkish cinema and the wider world of international art cinema. Featuring a comprehensive critical essay and a new extensive interview with the filmmaker, the editors of *Altyazı*, the cinema magazine published in Turkey, deliver a book designed as a guide for those intrepid enough to travel the minefields and dark tales of Demirkubuz's rich filmography.

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